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Workshop shows parents how to prevent bullying

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SAN BERNARDINO - Lavada Austin didn't know anything was wrong until her 11-year-old niece killed herself during winter break. "If I'd known what to look for, she'd still be here today," Austin said Thursday at the first of a series of parent workshops on bullying.

Most the other parents at the workshop were concerned their children were being teased or might be bullied in the future, sharing similar stories from their own childhoods.

But Austin, a foster parent, wanted people to know how serious the consequences can be.

Two thirds of bullying - like what Austin believes her niece, who was a student at Richardson Prep Hi Middle School, underwent - never turns physical, said **Shannon O'Brien**, who presented the series.

"Growing up, we thought bullying was something that just happened," O'Brien said. "It's not - I'm going to show you how you can raise kids who can stop it."

Even if bullying rarely leads to death, those involved - as bullies, bullied or bystanders - often carry the scars for years, making it important for parents to know what to do about it, O'Brien said.

That's not to say parents should be oversensitive, she added. Some rude remarks and roughhousing shouldn't be treated as bullying - though it may be worth finding a way to remove yourself from the situation - if the actions aren't deliberate hostile

activity intended to harm and create fear of further aggression.

Self-respect is key, O'Brien said.

"You have to have a child who has enough self-esteem that if someone knocks over their books they feel indignant, insulted," she said.

Research shows students in that situation shouldn't angrily escalate the conflict, and they shouldn't let it go, she said. Just look the bully in the eye and say the person who knocked over the books should pick them up.

The classes, paid for by a grant from Verizon, are still open.

The remaining sessions are scheduled to meet from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on Jan. 26, Feb. 2, Feb. 9 and Feb. 16 at the San Bernardino City Unified School District's Family Resource Center, 1525 E Highland Ave. Translated versions also are available at Serrano Middle School.

District schools - including Richardson Prep Hi - have a "zero tolerance" policy for bullying. District officials said they couldn't discuss details of the suicide because of privacy concerns, but that counselors were made available for students at the school afterward. Reach Ryan via email, call him at 909-386-3916.

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